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Statewide Anti-Smoking Campaign Takes New Approach in Curbing Teen Smoking
Edgy youth tobacco prevention campaign will be hard for teens to ignore

PHOENIX (Feb. 16, 2009) – Arizona seeks to set precedence with its new tobacco prevention and education campaign — “Brought to you by addiction.” — a mass media and grassroots campaign that harnesses the realities of tobacco addiction for an audience age 12 to 17. Its launch, today, marks a new frontier in teen focused anti-smoking campaigns in Arizona that until now focused on the health impacts of smoking. The campaign, which was created in consultation with a group of teen advisors—some smokers, some friends of smokers—is anchored in best practices from tobacco control experts across the nation and spear headed by Arizona’s Tobacco Revenue Use Spending and Tracking Commission (TRUST Commission) which works with the Arizona Department of Health Services Bureau of Tobacco Education & Prevention (ADHS BTEP).

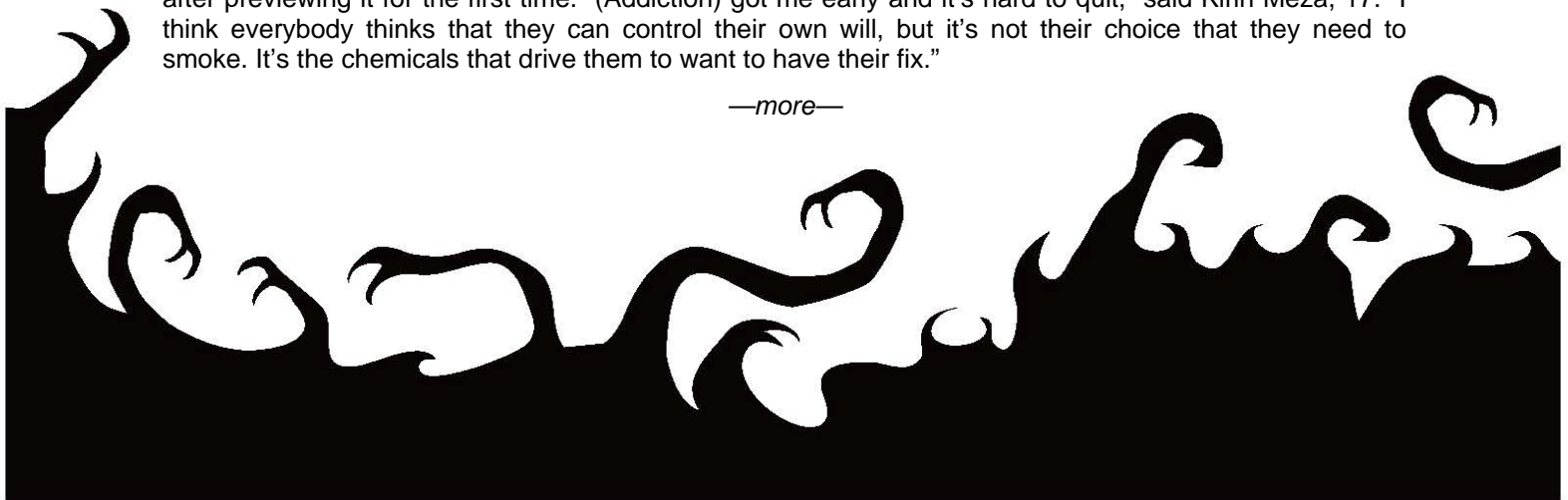
“Many teenagers perceive smoking as an intermediary activity, one that they will stop in a year or two. The reality, however, is that they find themselves addicted,” said Wayne Tormala, bureau chief for ADHS BTEP. “While most teen campaigns focus on health impacts, research pointed us in a new direction, one we believe will forever change the way youth perceive commercial tobacco.”

Through research it was discovered that forfeiting control to addiction was more relevant to teens than the health impacts message. In fact, there was a stagnant attitude toward the health effects of commercial tobacco use among the Arizona teens ages 12 to 17 who were interviewed. While they were well aware of the health implications and easily recited its impacts, these consequences were perceived as far removed from their immediate lives.

Ultimately, the idea of focusing the campaign on addiction was affirmed by both local and national research. Instead of health impacts, focus group participants were more moved by the loss of control over their day-to-day activities—the constant disruptions caused by nicotine addiction. This and other discoveries were amplified by research from national organizations, including the American Cancer Society reporting that only *three* out of 100 high school smokers think they will still be smoking in five years, while studies show that the reality is about 60 of them are smoking seven to nine years after high school.

A member of the teen consultant group, a smoker herself, confirmed that the campaign was on target after previewing it for the first time. “(Addiction) got me early and it’s hard to quit,” said Kirin Meza, 17. “I think everybody thinks that they can control their own will, but it’s not their choice that they need to smoke. It’s the chemicals that drive them to want to have their fix.”

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Funding for this new tobacco use prevention campaign comes from the tobacco tax approved by voters in 2002 through Proposition 303. These are tobacco tax funds, not state general funds, and they are dollars that must be used for tobacco use prevention efforts. The campaign's 2009-2010 budget is approximately \$3.5 million. Interestingly this is an amount near the \$3.6 million spent each **day** in Arizona alone on tobacco-related healthcare. However, the campaign's year-long budget pales in comparison to the annual tobacco industry marketing expenditures nationwide, which total \$13.4 billion according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

"With 23 percent of Arizona high school students smoking cigarettes, it is critical that we dedicate allocated funds to prevention and education efforts," said Bill Pfeifer, TRUST Commission Chairman and CEO of the American Lung Association's Southwest Region. "The Governor is already demonstrating her strong leadership by approving the use of voter-protected tobacco tax funds to launch this new youth tobacco prevention campaign."

The campaign includes English television ads, English and Spanish radio ads, posters, cinema advertising, online media, social media, a statewide grassroots effort, internet advertising and an original youth website, www.Venomocity.com —a term coined to mean tobacco addiction and all that comes with it. The website will quickly become popular with teens. In addition to hosting all of the commercials, it's a dark satirical take on the "voice" and "personality" of addiction that entertains visitors while providing valuable information on the topic.

The commercials hit the airwaves today supported on the ground by simultaneous youth events at local malls which introduced the campaign with support from local radio stations. The events were hosted by malls in Phoenix, Glendale and Tempe. Similar events are scheduled to take place in Tucson, Flagstaff and Kingman next weekend and more events in other cities and towns across the state are planned. The idea is to make the campaign tangible and relevant in places already frequented by youth.

Some smoking and tobacco addiction statistics follow, more can be found at www.tobaccofreearizona.com:

- The average age of smoking initiation is 12 ½.
- 90 percent of adult smokers were regular smokers by age 19.
- Almost a quarter of Arizona's high school students smoke (23 percent, a number that is higher than the national average.)
- 63 percent of high school smokers say they want to quit smoking.
- 49 percent of middle school students who smoke say they want to quit.
- Every day about 4,000 teens try smoking and of those, an estimated 1,140 become daily cigarette smokers.

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